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Leroy Garrett, Editor

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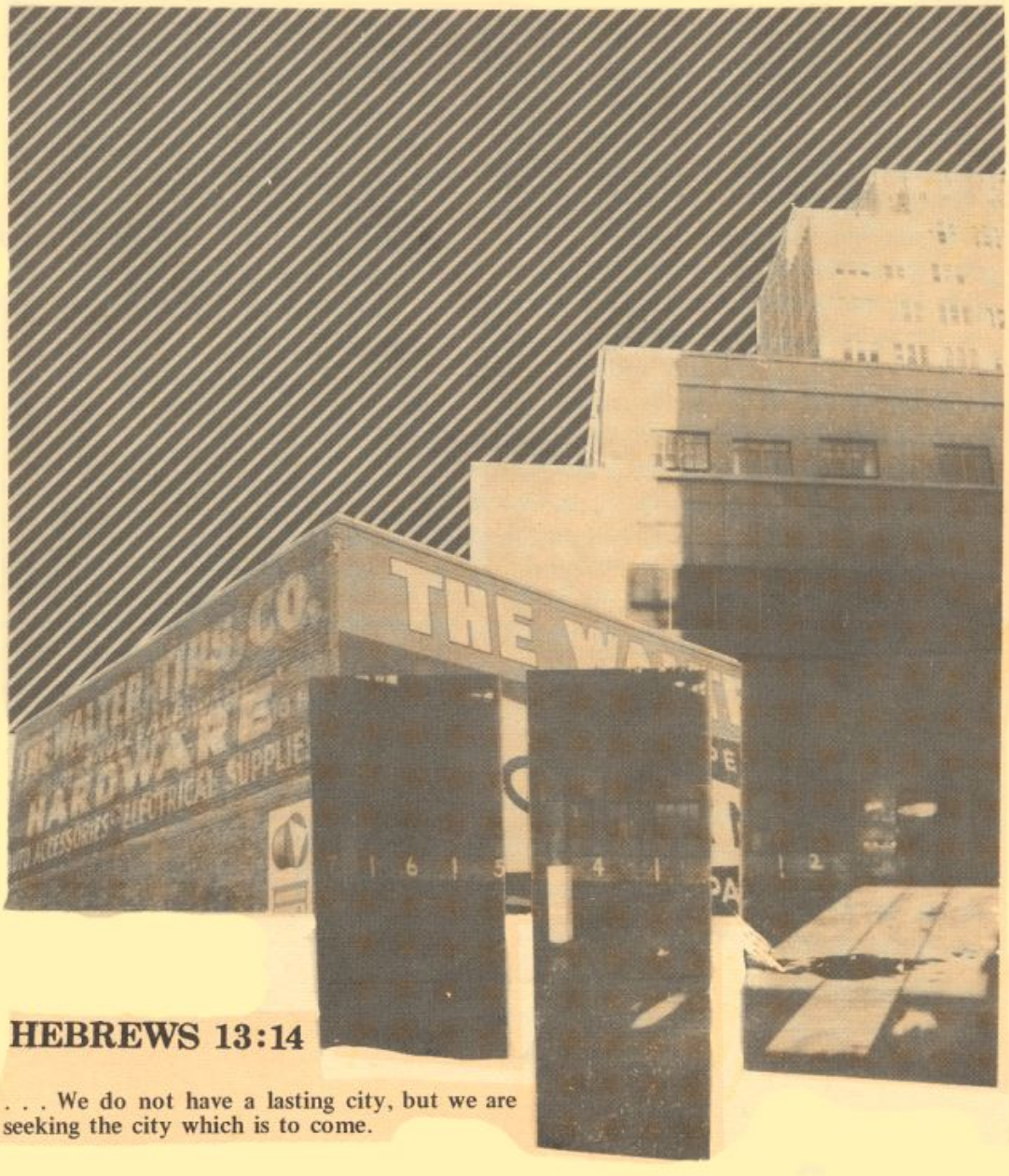

HEBREWS 13:14

. . . We do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come.

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The Church of Christ: Yesterday and Today. . .

THE SYNAGOGUE AS THE CRADLE OF THE CHURCH

The synagogue became the cradle of the church. Without it the church universal, humanly speaking, would have been impossible.—Alfred Edersheim

It is generally agreed that the synagogue arose in Jewish history during the years of captivity in Babylon. When the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C., the people were separated from the ritual and formality of their institutional worship. In a foreign land they remembered the words of their prophets, that God cared more for the heart than for sacrifice, and so they turned to study and prayer. Psa. 137 describes their frustration as it tells of how "Beside the streams of Babylon we sat and wept at the memory of Zion, leaving our harps hanging on the poplars there." They could no longer go to the temple, so they turned to house meetings, sharing and praying together, holding out hope that God would one day return them to their home. This was but a remnant of the faithful, of course, but they began a practice that developed into the synagogue, which became the cradle for the Church of Christ. Even when the Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple in 515 B.C., the synagogue had played such a crucial role that it gained a place of its own, independent of the temple. By the time of Christ these meeting places had sprung up all over the Roman Empire, everywhere the dispersing Jews had settled. Josephus assures us that there were 482 in Jerusalem alone.

This is an amazing thing in God's providential care. There is nothing in the Old Covenant scriptures about the synagogue. No prophet told of its coming, and its existence cannot be traced to any explicit instruction from God. Yet its place proved to be so significant to the community of believers in Jesus as well as to Israel that we can only conclude that it arose with heaven's intention. Jesus did not only *not* disapprove, but made ample use of it, as Matt. 4:23 indicates: "He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people." Abram Leon Sacher, president of Brandeis University, in a recent history of his people, describes the significance of the synagogue. Writing of the exile in Babylon, he says:

> It was during this period too that the institution of the synagogue developed, destined to survive until the present time. Bereft of Temple and of religious centers, each little community created its own meeting place. The exiles would congregate, usually on the sabbath, to hear their elders read to them the prayers which had been handed down by tradition. Alms would be

> distributed, and perhaps there would be instruction in the ritual that was practicable in a strange land. When the exile was over, the synagogue was brought back to Palestine. And when national life was again snuffed out, the synagogue went with the wandering Jews into every corner of the globe. All through the ages there was never a place where Jews could not meet to keep alive the faith of their ancestors,

And Sacher could have added that these far-flung synagogues became the cradle for many a congregation of Christians throughout the empire. The scriptures make it clear that the envoys of Jesus made ready use of them in the proclamation of the gospel. Acts 13:5 tells of how Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogues of the Jews after landing at Salamas, and verse 14 of the same chapter gives some description of the method they used: in Antioch of Pisidia *they went to the synagogue on the sabbath and took their seats.* The leaders then invited them to speak, saying, “Brothers, if you would like to address some words of encouragement to the congregation, please do so.” This would be unlikely in a clergy-centered modern church, but it would have been common in a primitive congregation, due in part to the influence of the synagogue.

Acts 14:1 tells of the apostles preaching in a synagogue in Iconium with such effectiveness that “a great many Jews and Greeks became believers.” Paul had a great ministry in Berea, where the people were “more noble” than in Thessalonica and “received the word with all readiness of mind” and “searched the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.” The record says that many Jews became believers as well as many upper class Greeks. And all this took place in the synagogue. It is noteworthy that Luke tells us that “they visited the Jewish synagogue as soon as they arrived” (Acts 17:1 0) . Greeks attended the synagogue as “God-fearers,” people sympathetic with Judaism. There is evidence that Paul was as interested in reaching them as he was the Jews. Acts 14:17 has him addressing these people as “fearers of God” as well as addressing “men of Israel.” Acts 10:2 describes Cornelius as being of this class.

Almost certainly many of these synagogues became Christian, while surely there were still many more believers in Jesus who remained within the context of synagogue life. It is no accident that Jas. 2:2 would say, “Now suppose a man comes into your synagogue. . .” Among the hundreds of synagogues in Jerusalem it is highly likely that many of them became Messianic. The ministry of Stephen as described in Acts 6:8-15 would suggest this.

The synagogue was not only the cradle of the church in terms of providing the immediate prospects for conversion to the faith, but also in terms of serving as a kind of guideline for the worship, function and organization of the new community. It were as if God brought the synagogue into existence to serve as a stepping-stone between the

formality of the temple and the simplicity of the church. Too, the synagogue, unlike the temple, could be adapted to any situation and any culture. It could "go" with the Jews wherever they went, and it required only ten heads of a family, preferably men of leisure, to get one organized. If the number were fewer, then it would still be a "place of prayer" (Acts 16:13).

The organization is basically what we find in the primitive congregations. The "elders of the Jews" (Lk. 7:3) were the leaders of the synagogues as well as the local Sanhedrin (the court). The "ruler of the synagogue" (Acts 18:8) was the officer who presided over the meetings and was a kind of general supervisor (a deacon?) subject to the elders. He would also act as the school-master when the synagogue served also as a school, which was usual.

The qualifications for the elders was remarkably like those laid down by Paul for the elders in the church. They were to be irreproachable in behavior, including their family; they were to be humble, modest, simple and neat in dress, not self-assertive. Knowledge of the scriptures was a special requirement, and they were duly examined in the word before they were ordained to office. They were elected by the people making up the synagogue (and *not* by the existing elders, as is common these days), sometimes for life and sometimes for a limited term.

There was a complete absence of anything similar to the modern clergy-man or resident minister.. Priests were sometimes present, and they might give a closing priestly benediction or address the congregation along with others, but they did not control the service. It was opposite to the temple in this respect, for it could and did get along beautifully without priests.

The renowned scholar R. T. Herford, in his *Judaism in the New Testament Period*, speaks of this.

> There was not, until modern times, any regular preacher at any given synagogue... The synagogue has never recognized anyone as having such power as that of a priest who administers a sacrament in the Christian church. . .
>
> Neither of these (officers) held a position even remotely resembling that of a clergyman or minister in the Christian church. The whole congregation were lay men, there was no clerical order, still less a priestly one, and whatever was done in the course of the service was done by members of the congregation, and could be done by anyone of them. (p. 164, 169)

Rabbinic literature preserves one amusing practice of those rabbis who visited the synagogues, expecting to be called on to say a word. It was understood that they would refuse when first asked, but equally understood that they expected to be asked a second or even a third time, when at last they would speak their wise words. Apparently Jesus and the apostles ignored all this when they were asked, but they were something other than clergymen! The synagogue gives us something odd: laymen inviting visiting clergy to address *their* service. It seldom works the other way, that's for sure.

Synagogue worship was almost precisely what we find in the earliest church, excepting of course the Lord's Supper and prayers to or in the name of Jesus. They had prayers, praise, reading of the scriptures (Old Covenant scriptures of course), exhortations, and maybe almsgiving (Matt 6:22). We cannot be sure that either in the synagogue or in the churches there was anything similar to a regular collection. As many as seven men might do the reading. If the exhorter or teacher were especially knowledgeable, there would be a question and answer period. Translations were also common, for a traveling teacher might speak only Hebrew or Aramaic, and so his words would have to be translated in those synagogues using the language of that particular culture. Some renowned teachers would have their own translators with them, being suspicious that what the local translator said was other than what he said!

And there was one interesting difference in that a synagogue would likely have a room for corporal punishment. Since the elders were also judges of the local Jewish community *(not* the Roman or whatever), they sometimes sentenced one to be flogged. The servant of the synagogue would attend to this back in the "bawl room." Not a bad idea for us, come to think about it.

And they *used* their building. They met regularly on Monday and Thursday as well as the sabbath, along with all sorts of festive occasions; and it served as a daily school as well. It was usually built of stone. The doorway would have such ornamentation as a seven-branched candlestick or an open flower between two Paschal Iambs. Inside would be a chest for the scriptures, near which sat the elders and other honorable ones (Matt 23:6). In the center would be an elevated desk where both the reading and teaching took place. The benches would form a semi-circle around the reader, with men and women separated. Visitors and God-fearers would sit in the back.

It was into such a synagogue that our Lord entered in his native Nazareth (Lk. 4:1 6), where he had worshipped and been schooled as a boy. While it was to become a custom, this was his first visit to a synagogue since beginning his ministry. Because of what they had heard about his work in nearby Capernaum, they were curious about him, being all the more reason why he would be called upon to read and say a word, once he had entered and taken a seat amongst the others—almost certainly not one of the chief seats!

The servant of the synagogue went to the chest against the back wall, next to the elders, opened it and removed the scroll of Isaiah. He walked back to the desk where Jesus was now standing and handed it to him. Jesus "found the place," which was Isa. 61, that just happened (God's wonders are seen in little things as well as big) to be the reading assignment for that day. Once he had read, he sat down to make his comments. All this was regular procedure in a Jewish synagogue, Except this time it was the Messiah himself who had been called on to read and teach, and he showed them that he himself was the fulfillment of their own scriptures.

Jesus could speak in the synagogues because they were free institutions, unshackled by clerical power. We see this also in the primitive congregations of believers. The church at Rome was able to instruct one another (Ro. 15:14) and the Corinthians were told "At all your meetings, let everyone be ready with a psalm or a lesson or a revelation" (1 Cor. 14:26). Heb. 10:24-25 indicates that those believers stirred each other to love and good works in the various meetings they shared together. This is synagogue stuff, with the believers gathered with their elders, teaching and edifying each other from the word. Emil Schurer, the great German Jewish scholar, writes of this in his *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ.*

> The peculiarity here is, that just for the acts proper to public worship, the reading of the Scriptures, preaching and prayer, no special officials were appointed. These acts were, on the contrary, in the time of Christ still freely performed in turn by members of the congregation, on account of which Christ was able, whenever He came into a synagogue, to immediately address the congregation. (Vol. 3, p. 62)

This is what we are asking for the Church of Christ today, that it be free in its ministry as were those ancient synagogues that became the nurseries for the earliest churches. Our churches today are more like the temple in its ministry than like the synagogues or the primitive congregation, controlled as they are by professional staffs. If Jesus walked into any of our assemblies and sat down, he would remain seated, if it took being called on to move him. Nobody is called on hardly ever, not even traveling teachers, for it is understood that the hired functionary is always to be doing his *thing.*

We lose so much with this kind of system. Our brothers and sisters have so much to share with us. The "pool of knowledge and experience" that is always there in a community of people is virtually wasted. The system turns our congregations into mere auditors and spectators rather than participants. Even the elders are strangers to most members, for they do not sit before the community as its teachers, as they did in the synagogues of the Jews and finally in the synagogues of the Messiah. As the synagogues

were kept small and numerous, we would do well to do likewise, so that the warmth, friendship, love, and sense of family community could be enjoyed as it was then.

There is some concern these days about the pattern for the church. It is evident enough that we have far more pattern than we are following. One is made to wonder is we *really* want to follow the scriptures, or if we had rather go our own way, according to our own traditions. I for one would like to see a few of our churches reflect the ways of those old synagogues. Then if the likes of Jesus should come around, we can hear what he has to say!—*the Editor*

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THE WOMAN I CANNOT FORGET

She was a lovely, engaging looking woman of 62, though she appeared to be younger. Her hair was still dark brown, though now touched with gray, Her complexion was fair and clear, her features resolute and feminine.

We "met" at a place where new acquaintances are rarely made—in a Long Beach funeral home. She lay dead in a simple casket in a lonely room, unattended by either persons or flowers. But the mortician, my new friend T. C. Archibald, arranged an appropriate Christian funeral for her, and he had her looking nice, even if there was no one to come to see her. He and a minister, just the two of them, would lay her to rest with a simple graveside service.

A lawyer, who attended her estate, arranged for her burial, all by phone, and even he did not call to pay his respects. She left this world without any loved ones. Nobody, except a distant cousin in a distant city, who would not likely make it to the funeral.

A widow, apparently for a long time, she died in a rest home. As probably the only visitor to her bier, I was curious to know more about her, for I saw in the form she left behind signs of admirable womanhood. But it did not matter, for as she lay there she represented to me those countless lonely souls who have to live their latter years as "the forgotten ones" and to die alone. Archie told me that it was common in California for one to live and die apart from his loved ones. And there are many who do not care to be bothered with the sick, aged, and dying kin, even if they are nearby.

It was just one more case for poor Archie, who does his thing for the Lord as an undertaker that cares, but that dear lady lingers in my mind, forcing me to write about her —a rare set of circumstances that brings her into the columns of this journal! I am now in faraway Mexico City, somewhat alone myself in a city of 12 million, and I am still thinking of that casket in Long Beach, alone in a dark mortuary, or perhaps now interred in some, it matters-not-where, grave that will never be visited.

Maybe she was my sister in the Lord, alone in the world with no one to care. Maybe she died peacefully in hope of immortality. Maybe not. In any case she haunts my mind as reflective of the human predicament. Widowhood. Loneliness. Illness. Pre-mature death. Forsaken. Her name is Legion, for there are countless souls who must walk that way. And there are so few who care. As I stood beside her those few moments, the unlikely visitor that I was, it bothered me that she had to die alone, with no one to hold her hand, no one to pray for her, and no one to bear her to her grave except professionals. It seemed grossly wrong in a community where there are tens of thousands of Christians who make up what is suppose to be God's sensitive community.

Our Lord's concern reached out to the poor and the deprived, to the rejected and the lonely, to the sick and the dying. His church as his Body, if it truly be "the fulness of him who fills all in all," must also reach out to those who hunger for fulfillment, including those that Thoreau describes as living in "quiet desperation."

Those in rest homes, retirement complexes, and nursing centers (not to mention the countless shut-ins in private residences) are a vast new mission field emerging in our culture. In another decade or so our aged will account for upward of one-fourth of our population, and many of these will be among the forgotten ones.

That is our challenge: to see to it that no one really be forgotten in a nation of millions of Christians. Once we see the church, not as a preserver of orthodoxy or a people of doctrinal purity, but as a ministering community for Jesus' sake, we will move more in this direction.

The aged are often a bother. They may not hear or see well, and they are sometimes self-centered. Others may make better company. But that is where agape love comes in. Like Jesus, we are here to serve, not to be served. Ouida and I have been visiting folk in the several rest homes in our city, and we are impressed with their great need for tender loving care. They need to be listened to lovingly, and they are encouraged by the gospel message of hope.

Ouida has remarked several times, after being with these forgotten ones, "Oh, I don't want to get old!" A natural reaction, and if we allow our "natural man" to rule our hearts, we'll be saying, "I don't want to be around people like that." But if we love like Jesus loves, which is the Spirit's fruit in our hearts, then we'll see youth and beauty in all that lives.

I don't dread seeing my Ouida grow old, for that too is part of God's plan for us all. She'll be rich in God's love and beauty at whatever age. But the thought of her having to die alone, unloved and unwanted by anyone, and finally to be laid to rest by strangers, grieves my heart. Surely the Lord is always with us, and that is the great consolation in all suffering, but he also ministers through his community. Acts 8:2 is a touching verse: "Devout men buried Stephen, and made great lamentation over him."

When my loved ones lie ill, I want someone to be there who cares. When they grow old and useless, I want someone to grieve when they leave this world. Surely God wants this for everyone.

The hundreds of churches in California (and everywhere) should enroll every rest home in the state as an important part of their mission. An organized effort should be made to see to it that the aged and the lonely are not wholly neglected. Certain patients could be assigned to families in the church who could visit such ones regularly, check on them by phone, send them cards, read to them, write letters for them, have them into their homes, and generally "adopt" them as among their loved ones. And see to it that they do not suffer and die alone.

It is a matter of human dignity. The woman I cannot forget was a person, created in God's image, with the right to love and be loved. The church is remiss in its mission when it does not move in beside the lonely and the forgotten and hold their hand and say, "We love you." It is an indignity, upon ourselves as well as them, to do otherwise. Something is wrong when people suffer and die alone in the very shadow of our buildings.—*the Editor*

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ON BREAKING BREAD A SECOND TIME ON LORD'S DAY

I told the congregation that it was the first time in all my years among the churches that I had seen it done, and that it was a real blessing to me. I had just taken the Lord's Supper for the second time on that Lord's Day. It was the evening service. There were some there that had not assembled with us that morning. So we had the Supper again, all of us. There was no difference, the same as that morning, and I noticed that most, if not all, in the congregation shared in that communion a second time, as I did.

This was at the Lowell Church of Christ in Lowell, Indiana, a congregation that dates back to the 1840's. It is now instrumental, but continues to go by the name it has always worn. In recent years a non-instrument church has gone into business a few blocks from them. A sign on the highway sets the would-be visitor at ease, for it reads: "Church of Christ - Vocal Music." How better can one keep the kingdom of Cod straight than that?

I explained to these brethren who had served me the Supper the second time that they were well within the province of scripture, for Jesus says, "As often as you break this bread and drink this cup you show forth the Lord's death till he comes." In fact, this is a far sounder course than what is usually practiced by those churches of my acquaintance: serving the Supper a second time to a few in the congregation (or isolating them in some room apart) while the rest of us have no part in it. In the scriptures the Supper is obviously a congregational act, and if the congregation does not take part, then those few that do

partake may as well do so at home. I have seen churches serve the Supper to one lonely soul, standing there all by himself amidst a hundred brethren or more. While I have never experienced this, I should think one would be embarrassed or feel conspicuous in such an instance.

It is most appropriate that *all* the saints who are assembled break bread whenever it is served, wherever that it or however often. If a couple chooses to have the Supper at their wedding, then let all of the believers who are there join them. In the scriptures it is almost certainly a congregational act, not an individual one. I am not saying it is wrong for it to be served other than congregationally, but I am saying that in the scriptures the Supper finds its meaning in relation to the corporate assembly of saints. 1 Cor.10:17 for instance: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

I have never missed breaking bread on Lord’s Day except for a time or two when I was in the hospital. If I were for some reason hindered from attending the regular assembly where the Supper is served to all, I would not elect to partake of it by myself or with a few others in a later assembly. Nor would I want it brought to me at the hospital. If I could not be there when the assembly breaks bread, the Lord would excuse me. It is the Body that is to break bread, both as a memorial to what Jesus did and is and as a testimonial that we are all one in him.

The cup and the loaf have no efficacy in themselves. they are not sacraments in that they, in the very act of taking them, bestow grace to our souls, our good Roman Catholic friends notwithstanding. It is a family act in that brothers and sisters are assembled to glorify their Father and to bear testimony to what their savior means to them.

When I was a boy preacher at Freed-Hardeman College, a friend and I tried in vain to make our way through mud and rain to a preaching appointment out in the country. We arrived, wet and muddy ,just as the saints dismissed. Someone did take us home and fed us, but we missed the Lord’s Supper, and my views were very traditional back in those days. I couldn’t dare miss “the elements” for I might die before next Sunday. So once back at the college, my friend and I looked up old Spence, the school’s big black janitor who also served as custodian to the white man’s church, and got him to open the closet so we could partake of the elements before the Lord’s Day passed. I can see that big, lovable soul even yet, looking at me as he was arranging the trays and asking, “Did you get yourn?”

Did you get your? goes far in describing the Church of Christ view of the Lord’s Supper. It accounts for a second serving of the Supper to only a handful. Each one is to get theirs! That being the point, why not just have the brothers who miss in the morning take the Supper on their own at home, or take it at work over in a corner somewhere? If one poor soul can stand alone in an auditorium and partake of it, while scores sit there and wait while he does so, then he could surely do so alone in a more intimate setting.

But at Lowell, I *did* take the Supper in the evening service, a second time for that day, because the congregation had assembled for that purpose. And if they had assembled the following Thursday for the same purpose, I would have joined in, even though I do believe, because of what history says as well as the scriptures, that the *usual* time for the Body breaking bread is "the day of the Sun," to quote Justin Martyr.

I told them that as a boy preacher I would go out in the afternoons and speak to assemblies after meeting elsewhere in the mornings, but would not break bread with them since I had "already had mine." But that I had learned more about the meaning of the Supper, that it is a communion of believers and the Lord. So now, wherever I am, if believers have met to break bread, I as their brother break with them, however frequent that may be. On the occasions that I am with a church that has two morning services, I take part in both memorials. Now really, does it make sense to sit with brethren who are communing with the Lord and not commune with them? The idea that "I have had mine" is Romanism and it is also beside the point. The point is that God's family has gathered to break bread, and I as part of that family should join in.

Our churches would do well to discard the second serving of the Supper altogether (and teach that those who cannot attend *the* assembly are excused) or else follow the spiritual wisdom of the saints in Lowell and have a second assembly for the Lord's Supper, with all the congregation sharing in the proclamation.—*The Editor*

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THE ILLUSION OF CONGREGATIONAL AUTONOMY

Most of the congregations within the Restoration heritage, especially our own Churches of Christ, are no closer to the practice of autonomy than are Roman Catholics or Episcopalians. Oh, I realize that *legally* most of our congregations control their own property, and, if need be, they could go their own way without a court battle. But when it comes to week to week activities, and the beliefs that these imply, we are as bound to tradition and the practice of sister congregations as any people have ever been. We may *talk* about autonomy and even prize the ideal, but we do not even begin to practice it.

Take a little thing like arranging for a slightly controversial singing group to visit one of our churches. The best way to get them accepted is to point out that they have appeared at Central in Midland, Fifth and Izzard in Little Rock, and Rochelle Road in Nashville. Other loyal churches have accepted them! That is the big deal. Never mind about how spiritual or edifying they are, and never mind what a blessing their appearance is likely to be. If others don't accept them, we don't!

So with speakers who might be a little different. How close to Jesus they are is not considered. How much they have to offer is beside the point. “Our brethren don’t use him” is all that need be said to most of our leadership. But if he is accepted, if he is really *in*, then he is OK to have around, however superficial his contribution to the well-being of the saints may be.

The same with any idea or practice. It is very difficult for a congregation to take up any new approach to old problems unless there is some precedent for it “among the Lord’s people,” meaning you know who. This is the case even when the practice is scriptural or at least permitted by scripture, such as the laying on of hands. I am always seeing pictures in The Christian Standard of this practice among our brethren in Christian Churches—the ordination of elders and ministers—which is not without scriptural precedent. One is as likely to see such as this in the *Firm Foundation* or the *Gospel Advocate* as he is in an advertisement for a pipe organ. I dare say that if some Church of Christ in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area should start laying hands on its elders in an ordination service, which in the New Testament was done by an evangelist, it would quickly bring such censure as to virtually ostracize it from all others.

The sin is not in departing from scripture, but in being different from other churches. It may be cruel to say it, but the truth is that a lot of our folk don’t really care what the Bible says. It is what the Churches of Christ practice that counts, for after all that is what the scriptures really mean!

Let one of our congregations have a choir, allowing gifted singers to encourage their brothers and sisters in praise to God, which is *at least* as scriptural as congregational singing, and see what happens to it on the way to heaven. Or even such a simple thing as a solo.

Or let it have set periods for fasting and praying - a fasting church, and see what the *faithful* churches do to it.

Or let it literally “lift up holy hands” in prayer and praise to God, which a few of our daring souls are doing here and there.

Or let it have some visiting brother from the Christian Church lead the congregation in prayer or address the saints—or even a brother from some other party in the Church of Christ for that matter. Never mind how beautifully he may be able to bear the saints to the very throne of God through his gift of praying. ‘Tis better, we all know, to hear some poor soul drone through the usual cliches to the utter boredom of us all than to trifle with unorthodoxy.

Or let it discard some of our sacrosanct practices, such as the invitation song. Or turn Wednesday night into family visitation. Or print, paint, type, write, or emboss some name beside Church of Christ. Or call for a special collection for the Red Cross or Salvation Army rather than one for our orphanages or missions.

It is a form of idolatry, this passion to appease other congregations. It is the lordship of party practice rather than the lordship of Jesus. "If we do that, they'll criticize us. . ." becomes a virtual mandate. "Our people don't do it that way" becomes more important than what the scriptures actually teach. You can frighten most of our elderships with "If you keep doing things like that, there'll not be a preacher in the brotherhood that will preach for you." That, of course, is part of the problem, preachers do preach *for* churches more than for the Lord and for truth's sake, and so a lot of folk are caught up in a "play loyal" game.

Congregational autonomy is virtually nonexistent among us. All our talk about it is a joke, a colossal illusion. We feel a keen responsibility to stay within the general practice of our particular brand of Churches of Christ. To get "marked" as liberal or anti or charismatic or even as *different* is feared like a plague. Any brother who suggests that "the other road" be taken is considered a threat, and he will be made to suffer in one way or another if he dares to take that other road himself. And believe it, dear reader, it doesn't matter what the Bible has to say about it.

When we tell our neighbors that our churches are autonomous, we are deceiving them. We should say something like this: *We have a rather strict party line, an unwritten creed, that all our churches follow. If a church gets out of line, it is disfellowshipped by the others. We are uniform in name, organization, doctrine, and practice because we don't veer from the way we've always done it.* If a neighbor asks such a nauseating question as, "But suppose a congregation finds some new truth," we will of course respond, "That can't happen, for we already have all the truth." The neighbor might not buy it, but I believe we'd get an *A* for honesty!

But we do have some truly autonomous congregations, and praise God that freedom is having its way with some of us. It is my judgment that these churches are terribly feared by the others. Orthodoxy must not allow them to survive. Their penalty for being different must be death or at least isolation. Their very existence is a threat, for how could they dare change when they were already like the rest of us. To change from being right can only mean that one is now wrong.

I am not here weighing the place of autonomy itself. Our folk have always assumed autonomy to be the way of God, which may be open to question. The congregations in the New Testament were hardly autonomous in that they were under apostolic authority, or they were suppose to be. Paul merely needed to write a letter and that would change things, or that was the way it was supposed to be. The New Testament churches were more apostolic than autonomous. In any event, the scriptures do not talk about how autonomous we are to be. I am not sure how that term came to be such a big deal in our history and in our thinking. We have never practiced it, that's for sure. Take away editorocracy, clerical

rule, domination by Christian colleges, the demand to be like other congregations, and you have no rule left for the churches in our history.

But still we assume that autonomy is desirable, perhaps even scriptural. We are all still under apostolic rule and the lordship of Christ, and as God's kingdom on earth we are a monarchy under King Jesus rather than a democracy. But we are to be autonomous in that each one of us is to decide his own course and follow his own conscience, looking only to Jesus and his word for guidance. Others are not to impose their conscience on us. This will allow for considerable difference between us even while we are all one in Christ. And this must be true of congregations as well.

If this is what we mean by autonomy, then it has a lot going for it, scripturally, pragmatically, psychologically, and every other way. I am all for it. I think we ought to start practicing it.—*The Editor*

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Notes from a Travel Diary . . .

CONVENTIONS IN CALIFORNIA AND MEXICO

In July I spent several days at the North American Christian Convention in Anaheim, an annual affair of the Christian Churches. I had two assignments, one being to talk to the college career group on conflicts, the other being an address to the theological forum, a gathering mostly of teachers and scholars, on the authority of the Bible, which was published in the last issue of this journal. I suggested to the college kids that conflicts are best handled by a realistic acceptance of self, followed by some good old Socratic self-examination, and I laid down a few guide-lines, such as *it is more important that I love than that I be loved.*

The logistics of such a convention, which attracts around 15,000 a year, is itself staggering, and one wonders how Leonard Wymore, the director, puts it all together the way he does. He is known in "big convention" business as one of the best. There are literally hundreds of participants, and there is more going on than one can possibly keep up with. It succeeds in being "a family convention," and there is some-thing for everyone. This time around it was next door to Disneyland, so there were a few days there when that famous park almost turned Christian. Since I did not have Ouida and the kids with me, as I had hoped, I had decided not to make my first visit to that attraction, but once I got out into my mini-meetings, two enterprising sisters and one of their husbands were resolved that I should not return to Texas without seeing Disneyland, if but for a few hours. In three hours we high-stepped it all over the place, and I must say that it was better than I

expected, for it is certainly a delightful and fascinating experience. It is surely worth one's while, especially if he can be guided by Ralph and Ruth Bales and Madge Archibald.

People are the most important thing about conventions. The NACC folk were my brothers and sisters and I love them dearly. The non-instrument brothers barely touch the life of this convention, partly due to their own exclusiveness, but it would be an appropriate experience for many of them. The Sweet Co. in Austin had some of its people there with a display of materials, and it was good to see Kip Jordan and Ron Durham manning that. John Allen Chalk from Abilene was on the program and did well for himself, and Harold Thomas from Los Angeles spoke to the gathering of *Fellowship* magazine. Hugh Tiner, David Reagen, Harry Fox Jr. and Sr., and Bob Denney were among some of the Church of Christ folk that were there. That is at least a beginning. But the NACC makes no serious effort to make it "an umbrella convention." It is a *denominational* gathering, but let's add, in the best sense of that term.

On the Lord's day I was out there I spoke to the Westchester Church of Christ where Harold and Roxie Thomas, old friends, are ministering; and to the Torrance Church of Christ in the absense of their preacher, Bob Marshall. Bob Denney is an elder in that congregation. He and his wife Mary are also longtime friends to Ouida and me. One can feel good about our future when the church has leaders like Harold Thomas and Bob Denney. We also had house meetings in the home of Ralph and Ruth Bales in Long Beach, the Denneys, and the Thomas'. Everywhere people are rejoicing in the positive changes that are taking place among our congregations.

I also got in my first visit to the Malibu campus of Pepperdine, and saw such old friends as Bill Banowsky, the president, and Anthony Ash, a professor of Bible.

I was home just one day before enplaning for Mexico City for the World Convention of Churches of Christ. Some 4,000 people gathered from 30 or more nations, all of them from churches of the Restoration Movement. It is a preaching and fellowship convention with only minimum opportunity provided for serious exchange relative to our common problems. But it is the only gathering I know of in the larger discipledom that has any chance of being "the umbrella convention" that a number of us see a need for.

While it is loosely related to the Disciples of Christ and draws part of its support from them, it proposes to serve all our groups, and its leadership, which is now headquartered in Dallas, is interested in informing the Churches of Christ of its purposes, and there is going to be a greater effort made to draw our people into its program. Allan Lee is the general secretary, and he is both charming and irenic. Bill Banowsky was scheduled to speak this time around, but it did not materialize. There were numerous brethren on hand from the Christian Churches, which is most encouraging, for the Disciples and the so-called Independents have had their problems in recent years.

The convention meets only every five years, which is probably too infrequent for the purposes some hope for it, and has convened in such places as Edinburgh, Adelaide, and San Juan. Next time it will be in Hawaii. Our folk who like to vacation amidst such excitement as a world gathering of brothers, should be making their plans for 1980 (a year later than usual).

I was especially pleased to get to meet several leaders of our Movement from New Zealand and Australia. Keith Bowes, who is principal of a Disciple college in Australia, told me of how our people there are very diverse in their theological views, but they have not divided as they have in the U.S.A. But he was perplexed about some of the anti-organ attitudes. He had read a bulletin from one of our Australian churches to the effect that "there are now 26 Christians in South Australia," and he was asking me what the brother could have meant. The Restoration plea, through British influence, reached Australia as early as 1840, and it has been active ever since with thousands of believers and scores of congregations.

My favorite speaker was Ken O'Grady of New Zealand, who made a plea for our people to be more sensitive to the Lord's demand for social justice. He began his remarks with "*Brothers and sisters. . .* ", which he repeated several times. Finally he said, "You are my brothers and sisters, and I am your brother, whether you like it or not. You are stuck with me!" I liked it and was glad to be stuck with him.

I was pleased to get to meet some of the new Disciple leadership, such as Daniel Joyce, the convention president, and Donald Teagarten, the general minister and president of the Disciples of Christ, who told me that he shared my hope that all our people might be brought together in such a convention as that one. Barney Blakemore is WCCC's new president.

I was back home only a day or so before leaving for two weeks' of meetings in Illinois and Indiana, amongst both Churches of Christ and Christian Churches. My boys, Phil and Ben, took the trip with me in the family car, and we all had a big time meeting scores of new friends and brothers and renewing old acquaintances in Decatur, Illinois, and Sellersburg (near Louisville) and Lowell, at opposite ends of Indiana. Space forbids that I relate all the goodies, but it is enough to say that we returned more convinced than ever that the Spirit is at work among our people.—*The Editor*

Christian Faith and Christian Freedom:

A PLACE TO STAND AND ROOM TO GROW

Thomas Langford

One of the continuing problems of the Restoration Movement in the twentieth century has been the difficulty of reaching consensus on distinctions between faith and opinion. This problem has had profound effects on the realization of the unity into which all of God's children are called. What are the essentials of that unity, and where does "the faith once for all delivered" shade into opinion and personal interpretation? Some insist that the seven "ones" listed in Ephesians 4 represent the irreducible minimum for our common faith, and that unless we agree on these, we cannot enjoy unity in the faith.

I suggest, however, that unity in Christ rest on something even more essential than intellectural agreement. If the church of God on earth is essentially and constitutionally one, as dear old Thomas Campbell so wisely wrote; if the church is God's family and bears important analogous characteristics to the human family as the scriptures teach; if the church possesses an element which the world cannot receive, as the scriptures also say with reference to the Spirit—then there is a unity which goes back beyond our efforts to find common ground on this issue or that, even issues so fundamental as those in Ephesians 4.

This essential and constitutional oneness of the church, based on the very nature of what God does for all who are born into this family, was what led A. Campbell to argue that nothing ought to be made a condition of fellowship which God had not made a condition of salvation. Whatever God requires of man as requisite to his entry into the spiritual family, into Christ and salvation, puts that man into fellowship with all others who have experienced the same conversion. I suggest, however, that Campbell probably meant more than one's initial conversion. A man's salvation is accomplished whenever he comes into Christ, but that gift has implications also for eternity, and must be maintained, in the nurture of the Spirit, through time. A man may neglect the faith which brought him salvation, even reject it and consequently be lost. If God has made continuance in faith the requisite for eternal salvation, as we think he has, then the brother who rejects or denies the faith has broken his fellowship, his part in the unity, with those who maintain it.

It is faith in and submission to Christ that saves, then, and open and wilful rebellion against Christ that destroys. Whether one is a child of God and in his family or not, he cannot be saved so long as he refuses to submit to the lordship of Christ. On the other hand, one who is in Christ and continually seeking his will, though he err and even sin, through weakness or ignorance, will still be saved. God's salvation is not a reward for perfect righteousness achieved by man, but rather a gift resulting from total trust in the perfect righteousness of Christ. All of us here, no doubt, claim the promise of salvation. But no one of us would claim such perfect obedience on our part as to have earned this boon. We know that we will be saved in spite of our mistakes, because we trust and seek to live for him whose righteousness qualified him to be our perfect sacrifice for sin. Isn't this the message of Paul to the Romans? Is there any alternative position, save Pharisaical

legalism? In other words, Christ's atoning death covers all our sin, so long as we stay with him, trusting, praying, seeking his will. But his blood covers none of us in rebellion, in wilful or premeditated flaunting of his will. Weak but growing children, yes—but rebels, no.

If we can agree with A. Campbell that nothing ought to be made a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation, we have need merely to determine what is the faith that saves, both initially and eternally. What is the faith, the acceptance of which brings life, the denial of which separates from God? It is response to the fact that Jesus Christ is God's son and the Lord of life. "Believe on the Lord with all thy heart, and thou shalt be saved." The one who accepts this, with all that it involves, is saved. Of course, acceptance of the Lord involves obedience to his direction,—"He that believeth and is baptized will be saved." It also involves a whole and radically new attitude toward life—an attitude which says that in every circumstance of life, one's response will be determined by the mind of Christ—the perspective, the feeling, the surrendered will of Christ. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

Now this approach may seem rather simplistic to some. It may seem to leave out too much. It certainly does not settle all of the "issues" which have concerned us so much in the past. But I am convinced that the faith that saves is something far more fundamental than all of these things: it is a response to life, a total surrender to Christ's way of life. It does not guarantee that we will apprehend the truth on every issue of life, influenced as we are by personal experience and background, but it does give assurance that all that is needful to our salvation will be given to us, as we trust, pray, and study. God will not allow a child of his to be lost, so long as he has yielded himself completely to the mind of Christ and seeks daily to perfect that surrender.

Once again, let me emphasize this process; the faith which saves leads to surrender to God's will in obedient trust. That surrender, illustrated by repentance and immersion into Christ, allows God to come in and take over the life that formerly was in league with rebel forces. God's entry is by the medium of the Holy Spirit, just as any newly born child receives his Father's spirit, the breath of life, and the likeness of the parent. So it was that Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Or, as he elsewhere wrote, "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, but the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit." That Spirit, the living representative of the will of God, takes up his home and begins his work upon this initial act of submission, at this point of birth. What the "Spirit will do from this point on, depends upon the quality and completeness of one's surrender. In some cases the surrender is so nominal that the presence of the Spirit can scarcely be detected. Such persons go through life, "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." They conform

to what their intellectual understanding tells them a Christian should do and be, but they scarcely ever yield themselves to the full flow of the Spirit's leading and joy. Others live each day with the will of God foremost in their hearts. Their surrender is so complete that they may be said to be "filled with the Spirit." that is, so full of God's life that there is little room for the fleshy, worldly self. And, of course, there are many of us somewhere between. In our search for Christian maturity, for the "stature of the fullness of Christ," we have our days of glory *and* our periods of rather mechanical Christianity when, although there may not be great evil, there is also little evidence of the spirit.

This submission is the faith that saves, the faith which surrenders man to be the instrument of God. It is the acceptance of the Lordship of Christ, the yielded life. All else is peripheral. The faith is not correct interpretation of scriptures on instrumental music, bible classes and missionary societies (there are no such scriptures!). The faith is not what you or I think of Herald of Truth, orphans' homes, premillenialism, or individual cups in the Lord's Supper. The faith is that Jesus Christ is God's son and Lord of all of our lives. If you have accepted that fact by being born again of water and the Spirit, you are my brother. Because you have received according to His promise the same Spirit as I, we are fellows together, joint heirs of God and brothers of Christ. The faith brought us together at baptism and the Spirit sealed and certified our union. I certainly care what you think about other things, but your opinion about nothing can take precedence over our agreement about and union in Christ.

Yes, I have some very definite opinions about your Sunday Schools and your instruments of music in worship. I was raised in a tradition which opposed them and I freely confess that they still bother me. I think they are both monuments to our neglect as a people, in the home and in the assemblies. There is no more scriptural warrant for one than the other; in fact, so far as I can see, none for either. So I think we would do better to dispense with them. I don't think anyone can show that either really does much good. The energy expended in organizing, maintaining, and rejuvenating Sunday Schools might accomplish more directed toward cultivation of home study and more lively, active family participation in the edification services of the church. And the pride of organ tones might more happily be directed toward cultivation of deeper involvement of all the congregation in meaningful praise from heart and lip.

"But all you are giving us is your own opinion." you are surely saying. I'm glad you see it. And, as opinions, they ought not to be barriers to our general fellowship. "The faith" is our mutual acceptance of the Lordship of Christ, our submission to his will in all matters, insofar as we can know it. It is not the perfection of our understanding of that will, as some seem to think. We differ in our opinions on many things, some important, some not, just as we differ in our levels of maturity and understanding of God's revelation. Some of these differences we have elevated to such importance as to be the tests of acceptance of

brethren, the causes to division. Yet no opinion can be that important—only the faith, the acceptance of the authority of Christ, is that important.

I keep going back to that inspirational document of the early 19th century, Thomas Campbell's "Declaration and Address." Have you ever read it all? I know you have heard excerpts from it, here and there, but if you haven't, please take the time to read it carefully in its entirety. What a message it still has! After insisting that "the New Testament is a perfect constitution . . . for the New Testament church," Campbell argued that "where the scriptures are silent. . . no human authority has power to interfere, in order to supply the supposed deficiency by making laws for the church." Don't we all agree with that? It's bound to be right. But what does that do for my arguments against the Sunday School? Since the scriptures are silent on the subject, I must merely argue, and seek to persuade you of the validity of my opinion that since Sunday Schools are not in the Bible you should consider whether they are valid institutions for the church today.

But I must not legislate for you, "to supply the supposed deficiency" of the scriptures which do not specifically forbid that you have your Sunday Schools. These are my opinions, they may be correct opinions (of course I think they are), but I must not impose them upon you. Now I can't see but that the matter of instrumental music is in exactly the same realm. I agree with many of you that there is no authorization for their use in the public worship, as far as the scripture is concerned. But neither is there a prohibition. The only argument that can legitimately be made from silence of scripture on this point is that I must not legislate for others "to supply the supposed deficiency" of the scripture.

> Campbell goes further to write: Although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church. Hence, it is evident that no deductions of inferential truths ought to have any place in the church's confession.

When these words were written our divisions had not yet come. Campbell was inveighing against all of the creedal distinctions and tests of fellowship common among Presbyterians and other sects in America in the early 1800's. Is it not ironic that we must now cite the same words to point up the folly of division among those who became heirs to the Campbell unity movement? Doesn't everything I've just read apply clearly and unquestionably to such things as have separated us during this century? We have deductions on these things, our inferences from scripture, but we know that in most

instances the scripture neither plainly requires nor condemns the practices that have become sources of such contention among us. All of us have our opinions, based upon our deductions from scripture, but "they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion. Listen again:

> Although doctrinal exhibitions of the great divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; whereas the church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.

Nothing that I have read in all of the literature of unity speaks so well to our situation today. It is a pity that we have cut ourselves off from the wisdom of our restoration pioneers. Some neglect them because their platform was too liberal—too devastating for the sectarian and party spirit. Others have turned away because they think the movement sought an impossible ideal—and has been judged and found wanting practically by the events of history. In spite of the defections of the right and left, I find the "Declaration and Address" as beautifully appropriate today as when it was written—true to scripture and true to common sense. When I hear criticism of the whole Restoration principle from a younger generation, I am convinced that it is not the program of these early stalwarts that is being found wanting, but the perversion of their ideals by a sectarian spirit that came later. The Restoration Movement has come for many to mean "patternism"—the blueprint concept—which sees the New Testament as a detailed rule book which sets forth every facet of the work and worship of the church. Our fathers of the early years of the movement were scarcely so restricted or constrictive in their views of the Book. Their distinction between matters of faith and areas of opinion was clearer. The scriptures were normative for them, as it seems to me that they must be for all who take Christianity seriously, but in areas where interpretation and deduction were possible and needful, there was room for differences within an unbroken fellowship.

Some of you know the story of Aylette Raines, the preacher within the movement who believed in universalism. The Campbells insisted, against considerable pressure, upon continued fellowship in the work with Raines, so long as he retained his universalist views as personal persuasion and did not insist that others should conform to his views. Raines later gave up universalism, testifying that it gradually faded into insignificance as he was

caught up in the great fellowship of the Gospel work. Had he been excluded and isolated, as many wanted, his views would have become more important to him and he would likely have pursued and defended them to his death.

Paul's essay on faith and opinion in Romans 14 seems to me to have justified the Campbells' treatment of Raines and to provide us a sound principle for brotherhood relations today. Although the question of meats may not bother us much today, we can understand Paul's strong censure of those who despised their brethren. "Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." In the following chapter, Paul gives the admonition the church sorely needs today: "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

It will be a good day for us and the church of God when we begin to obey Paul's injunction to the Romans, when, as God has done, we receive each other simply on the basis of each one's faith in Christ, "not to doubtful disputations," not to debate over opinions, but to grow together as we learn together, as together we drink of the same spirit, in what Campbell called "the after and progressive edification of the church."—*Associate Dean, Graduate School, Texas Tech U., Lubbock. Presented to 9th Annual Unity Forum, Nashville, July 5, 1974.*

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